

Rewriting the narrative

Community pharmacy is undergoing a seismic shift as we face a reality in which pharmacists are being asked to do more with less. Nationwide, pharmacists cry out for changes to improve working conditions in the overburdened health care system and to put greater focus on pharmacy team well-being.

In the media and on storefront signs, patients are being warned about staffing shortages and reduced hours at community pharmacies. However, this narrative misses the mark. Although enrollment in schools and colleges of pharmacies is dramatically down and there may be a pharmacist shortage in the future, there isn't a current shortage of pharmacists, but one of pharmacists willing to work in the current environment.

Clearing the smoke

In August 2022, *The New York Times* noted that pharmacists' wages are down by almost 5% from last year after adjusting for inflation and major retailers offered up to \$75,000 in signing bonuses this summer to recruit pharmacists in certain markets, saying that this was one of many steps to address pharmacy staffing shortages. But this is a smoke-and-mirrors fix. Short boluses of money do not address the systemic problem underlying phar-

macy workforce dissatisfaction and exits. It also doesn't address the pressures from the growing number of pharmacy team responsibilities, the quotas and metrics that must be met that are unrelated to patient outcomes or quality of care, and patients who are sometimes abusive and harassing.

The most recent submissions to the APhA and National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations' Pharmacy Workplace and Well-being Reporting (PWWR) initiative reflected a continued theme of pharmacists experiencing stressful workplaces. Stress has reached an all-time high especially for those working in community and hospital practice settings. While pharmacists provided access to medications throughout even the most daunting of the pandemic surges and provided COVID-19 testing and vaccination, workplace issues have remained and increased.

New PWWR analysis reveals a breakdown in communication between pharmacy staffers and upper management, leading to more pharmacy personnel saying their voice is not being heard. But there is good news, too: positive submissions highlighted improved work-life balance, changes in pharmacy operating hours, and workflow systems for enhanced efficiency and patient safety, to name a few.

Time for a new model

We need to ensure sustainable workplace conditions and opportunities for pharmacists to provide essential patient care services. Fixing the pharmacy payment and reimbursement system is needed. It's complex, but we're working on all levels to drive needed change.

At the same time, APhA continues to support pharmacists' well-being and healthy workplace conditions through tools and resources to monitor and improve your well-being, such as the confidential Well-being Index for Pharmacy Personnel, resources to address specific dimensions of well-being, educational training programs on stress management, and the Pharmacist's Fundamental Responsibilities and Rights. We hope that by focusing on the stories reported to PWWR, we'll spark improvement in the pharmacy workplace now and in the future.

Better patient experiences come from happy and healthy employees. I'm proud to be a pharmacist and of all the things pharmacists are doing across the profession. APhA will continue advocating to keep pharmacists in the profession and serving patients. Pharmacists add incredible value to the health care team and must be able to do what they do best: optimize patient care, serve the health care needs of the community, provide clinical care, and create positive health outcomes in patients. ■



ILISA BG BERNSTEIN
PharmD, JD, FAPhA
Interim Executive Vice President and CEO
American Pharmacists Association